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Sermon for Twenty-second Sunday after Trinity.

MATT. 18, 23—35.

During the years of His public ministry, our Savior had often spoken of His kingdom and had frequently referred to Himself as a king. His disciples, not understanding the spiritual meaning of His words, thought He was speaking of an earthly, visible kingdom, and, accordingly, imagined that they were to occupy the chief places in this kingdom. Yea, on one occasion, we are told, great strife had arisen among them who should be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. On another occasion, the mother of the sons of Zebedee had requested Him to promise to her sons the places on His right hand and on His left. Being Jews and ardent patriots, the disciples, of course, hoped that Jesus would reestablish the Jewish kingdom in all its former splendor and glory, that He would drive the pagan Roman out of the Holy Land, and, establishing His throne on Mount Zion, would rule over His people as the vicegerent of the Lord of heaven.

Now, though Jesus had earnestly striven to enlighten His disciples on this important question, He could not altogether disabuse their minds of the idea of an earthly kingdom. They had gradually realized that the kingdom of Christ was not to be the restored kingdom of Israel; but there were so many Jewish notions bound up with their conception of this kingdom that, even after the resurrection, some of them asked the Savior whether He would at that time reestablish the Kingdom of Israel. The parable which has been appointed to be read as the Gospel-lesson for this Sunday is one of the many attempts on the part of our Savior to teach His disciples the true spiritual, inward nature of His kingdom; especially, to teach them the laws governing the entrance into the kingdom, as well as the continuance therein. Let me, therefore, speak to you this morning of

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

1. *How one may gain it;*
2. *How, having gained it, one may lose it again.*

1.

Our text begins with the words: vv. 23. 27. This is one of the many parables our Savior told His disciples in order to teach them the affairs of His kingdom. Time and again, especially when He saw from the questionings of the disciples that their temporally minded hearts had failed to grasp the purport of His teachings, Jesus resorted to parables taken from everyday life in order to drive home His meaning. On one occasion, He likened the kingdom of heaven to a man who had two sons, the younger of whom took his portion and went into a far country, where he wasted his substance in riotous living, only to return to his father's house, a few years later, broken in body and mind. Again He likened it unto a man who sowed wheat in his field; again, to a sower who went out to sow his seed, which fell upon four different kinds of ground; again, to a mustard seed; again, to ten virgins, five of whom were wise and five of whom were foolish; again, to a householder who hired laborers into his vineyard; yet again, to a king who made a marriage for his son. And in the Gospel for to-day He likens it unto a certain king who would take account of his servants.

The occasion on which this parable was spoken was the following. Peter had come to Jesus and had asked Him, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" whereupon Jesus had replied, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times, but, Until seventy times seven." And to enforce this teaching, He told our parable, continuing thus: "Therefore the kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king which would take account of his servants." When this king began to reckon, the text goes on, one was brought to him who owed him the sum of ten thousand pounds, a sum of money, according to a rough calculation, equal to about thirteen millions of dollars, and, if we consider the decreased value of gold, the equivalent of about six or seven times that sum in our present currency. This sum was so great that the servant never could have paid it, not even if he and his wife and his children, and everything that he had, had been sold in order that payment might be made. The terrified servant fell down before the king, and besought him to have patience, and he would pay him all. Then the king had compassion on him and forgave him the debt. He granted him a great deal more than he had asked; for, instead of merely extending the time, he remitted the whole debt.

In these words, the Savior has drawn a picture of the kingdom of heaven; of the kingdom which was established when the Son of

God was made man in order to save us from sin and death; of the kingdom which was foretold, and which began to do its work on earth, when the Lord God Himself gave to our first parents the promise of the Seed of the Woman who should crush the head of the Serpent; of that kingdom which shall endure in the earth until the last of the elect shall have entered in at its gates, and which shall then be made perfect in the world to come. For the kingdom of heaven is the whole of God's dealing, both in time and in eternity, with sinful man, with him that is saved already, as well as with him that is yet to be saved. It is the relation of the saved sinner to his Savior, as well as the relation of the saved ones to one another. In spite of the fact, therefore, that this kingdom is established in time, its beginning and its end, its origin and its consummation, are in eternity. Though it has earthly citizens, it is not an earthly kingdom. Its nature, its constitutions, the principles that govern its operations, the spirit that is its life, are not of this world, as Christ said to Pilate, but of the world to come. It is an invisible, spiritual, supernatural, heavenly kingdom.

And how may one enter into this kingdom? Our Savior has taught us this in the first part of the parable. The King is God, our heavenly Father. The great debt is the debt of sin, which man can never pay. Man is by nature sinful and unclean; he is conceived and born in sin. Moreover, overcome by his own evil inclination as well as by temptation from without, he has sinned in thought, word, and deed. He has heaped guilt upon guilt, and incurred God's wrath and eternal damnation. And for this he is brought to trial; he must render account of himself and his doings. This takes place whenever the Lord enters into judgment with His servant, and it is done in the most various ways and at the most various seasons. One man passes through this experience in his early youth,—he is brought into the right relation with his God so early he does not remember when or how it happened; another, at the time of beginning adolescence; another, at the threshold of manhood; another, perhaps, in old age. Many a person goes on year after year, living a life of estrangement from his God. He knows, of course, that he is not perfect; he is conscious, perhaps, of very serious defects in his character and in his conduct; he remembers many a case of flagrant wrongdoing in his life. But he says to himself: "I am not worse than others. As compared with the average, I may even consider myself a fairly good man; aye, compared with a great many of those who are counted the world's good and great men and women, I have good cause to be well satisfied with myself, for I am a good citizen, a pillar of the community, perhaps of the church. 'Tis true, I do live in this sin or that; but that is nobody's business but my own, for I wrong no one but myself." Or, if he does commit

a sin which is primarily an injury to his fellow-man, he will find excuses without number. Sins against the law of purity he finds excuse for on the score of "human nature" or "human weakness," and those against the commandment "Thou shalt not steal" he would excuse with the slogan which covers a multitude of sins, "Business is business." To such a secure and self-satisfied sinner, the Lord comes and takes account of him. He holds up before the sinner's face the mirror of His holy Law, and stirs his conscience so that he awakes to a realization of his sinfulness, and falls down before the Lord with the words: "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner!" "Have patience, and I will pay Thee all!" And when the sinner has been awakened, when he has realized that before the Pure and Holy One he is nothing but sin and uncleanness, which God cannot abide, which, by the very law of His being, He must cast out into the utter darkness, then, and not until then, can the sinner be dealt with in grace and mercy. And how does God deal with the sinner in grace and mercy? He shows him the cross. On that cross hangs the suffering and dying Savior, dying for him, pouring His soul unto death for him, paying the penalty for his sin, and forever winning for him the redemption in His blood, the forgiveness of sins, which he may have freely, without money and without price. It is offered to him; it is his if he will but take it. And if the humble and contrite sinner, lying at the foot of the cross, giving over all trust and confidence in himself and his own worthiness and merit, thoroughly emptying himself of self-righteousness, lays hold on that forgiveness of sins in Christ Jesus, and places all his hope and trust in Him, he has forgiveness; he has left behind him the kingdom of Satan, the kingdom of darkness and death, and has entered into the kingdom of Christ. The debt of ten thousand pounds has been forgiven.

Now this matter of obtaining forgiveness of sins, or conversion, must be rightly understood. It is not an external, formal, business-like affair, but an inward change of heart. "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation; neither shall men say, Lo here! or, Lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." The heart of the sinner has been changed, and, with it, his relation to his God. Nor is it God that has changed. God alters not. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. From the beginning, God has been a loving, good, and gracious God, bent upon saving that which was lost. Nay, God has not changed; but the sinner has changed. One time defiant, pleased with himself and full of resentment against God's holy Law, which counted those things sin and uncleanness that were most dear to his heart by nature, he has become a humble, penitent, contrite sinner; he now mourns his sins and his sinful, lost condition, and realizes that he deserves naught but God's wrath and displeasure. He now from his heart loves his heavenly Father who has loved him first, and has forgiven him all

his sins, and he now knows no greater joy and happiness than to serve Him by a life of love and gratitude.

The debt of ten thousand pounds has been forgiven; the sinner is numbered among those who are saved in Christ Jesus; he has entered the kingdom of heaven.

2.

The second part of our text contains one of the most serious warnings of Holy Writ, teaching us that we must watch and pray lest we fall into temptation and again lose the kingdom of heaven, vv. 28—35.

The kingdom of heaven is within us; it is a precious mystery that we bear in our hearts — the secret or the mystery of the sonship of God. It is our relation to our God and Savior, who has saved us and redeemed us with His precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, who has come with the Father and the Holy Spirit and made His habitation in our hearts. It is a heavenly gift from on high which no power in heaven or in the earth can wrest from us. We are in the hands of our heavenly Father, out of which no one shall pluck us. And still we are warned time and again in Holy Writ that we must take heed lest we lose the kingdom again, lest, thinking we stand, we fall, lest, trusting in ourselves, our overweening confidence be the cause of our losing eternal life. Yea, Scripture repeatedly tells of persons who had entered the kingdom of heaven, and lost it again; and the second part of the parable contained in our text, for our warning, mentions the quarter from which, more, perhaps, than any other, our state of grace is endangered. The servant to whom the great debt had been forgiven went out of the court-room, doubtless, with a heart full of joy and gladness, ready, we should imagine, to make the whole world partakers of his joy, to call upon the birds that fly under the heavens to rejoice with him, and upon the beasts of the field to witness his happiness. For had he not met with unexpected, untold good fortune? Had he not escaped a terrible punishment, and received double for what he had asked? But alas, the ingratitude of man! He met a fellow-servant who owed him a hundred pence, a trifling sum, indeed, compared with the sum of ten thousand pounds, and straightway he fell upon him, choked him, dragged him to the judge, and had him cast into a debtors' prison to lie there until he should pay his debt. His heart knew neither pity nor love, and though he heard from the lips of his fellow-servant the very words that had won mercy for himself, he knew not mercy, but wrought upon him all harm and scathe that the law allowed. In order to realize the full extent of this cruelty, we must bear in mind how unspeakably horrible the debtors' prisons were even in so-called Christian countries as late as the nineteenth century after Christ — a time when the words "to rot in prison"

were not a mere phrase but, as a rule, a most terribly literal statement of fact. How much more terrible must a prison of that older and more inhuman age have been! Sorrow and grief over this terrible misconduct of the first servant, as well as sympathy with their unhappy brother, caused the fellow-servants of both to tell their master all that had happened. Whereupon the master called for the ungrateful servant, rebuked him for his ingratitude and cruelty, and condemned him to lifelong imprisonment, accentuated by pain and torture.

The meaning of this portion of the parable is perfectly clear. The second servant is our fellow-Christian. The sum of a hundred pence is the sins that one Christian becomes guilty of against another. The great difference between the two sums is to teach us that the debt that God has forgiven us is infinitely greater than any debt of sin we might ever be called upon to forgive a fellow-Christian. And, finally, he that is not willing to forgive his fellow-Christian his sins thereby loses God's forgiveness. There can be no doubt, therefore, that, when in reply to Peter's question our Lord said that we must forgive, "not until seven times, but until seventy times seven," and proceeded to enforce these words by this parable, He had stated a fundamental law of His kingdom—the law of unlimited mutual forgiveness. He who will not abide by this law of the kingdom, he who will not from his heart forgive, cannot remain in the kingdom of Christ; he falls back into his former guilty state, he is again in the kingdom of darkness, wrath, and perdition.

Now this matter, like the matter of obtaining forgiveness of sins, must be viewed in the proper light. Membership in the kingdom of God is not an outward matter that cleaves to the heart like a garment, but an inward affair of the innermost heart. When we are called upon to forgive our fellow-Christian, it is not a question of more or less, of how often and how much we must forgive, but a question of the temper of the heart. He who has received the forgiveness of God, who has tasted the sweetness of His love and grace in Christ, cannot but be willing to extend forgiveness to all his fellow-men, for whom Christ has suffered and died as well as for him. The kingdom of heaven is a kingdom of love and charity. For it is the nature of grace and love to conform to itself the hearts upon whom it is bestowed, and to reflect and reproduce from man what it conveys to man. It creates in man the grace and love like unto the grace and love of God who has forgiven him all his sins. Whenever therefore our flesh and blood tempt us to be unforgiving towards a fellow-Christian, we are in the gravest danger of losing the kingdom of heaven, for if we fail to overcome this temptation, the temper of our hearts undergoes a change. It is no longer in harmony with the temper and spirit of Christ. And if the temper of our hearts is at variance with the spirit that rules the kingdom of heaven, we

are no longer members of that kingdom. And what could be more unlike, more at variance with the spirit of Christ than a heart that will not forgive? Can we lay any claim to kinship with that spirit, who said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," if we are not willing to forgive those who sin against us? And again, if we are unforgiving towards our fellow-man it is because without our knowledge, perhaps, our hearts are beginning to be filled with pride, and puffed up with vain conceit, because we are no longer humble with, but think ourselves better than, our fellow-man, and ere we are aware, we are also no longer humble before our Lord. We begin to lay claim to merit in our own right; instead of trusting solely in Christ and His merit, we rely upon our own goodness and piety. In fact, ere we know it, we are no longer humble, penitent sinners, but proud, self-righteous Pharisees, and our last estate is worse than the first. We are no longer members of the kingdom of Christ.

Furthermore, what is true of the sin of uncharitableness is likewise true of every other sin. Every sin is not a question of more or less, but of the temper of the heart. Every sin, whether great or small, whether a sin in act, in word, or in deed, whether a sin of omission or of commission, intentionally committed and willfully persisted in, interferes with the relation of the sinner to his God and Savior. It changes the temper of the sinner's heart, and thus causes him to fall from grace and commits him to eternal damnation.

'Tis true, we sin daily, and that not once or twice only, but much and often, without thereby falling from grace. For as soon as we realize that we have sinned, we heartily repent and obtain forgiveness. Such sins, as Luther says, are covered by the Lord's Prayer. Sins, however, that are not repented of and therefore unforgiven, are a most terrible menace to our souls' salvation. The ninety-five theses, therefore, that Luther nailed to the church-door at Wittenberg, begin with the statement that our whole life must be a continuous repentance, not a series of successive acts of repentance, but a penitent state of the heart. For our state of grace is an affair of the heart. The kingdom of heaven is within us.

If, therefore, dearly beloved, we would not lose our souls' salvation, let us not sleep like the foolish virgins, let us not go on in a state of indifference toward sin, let us not live in sin, fondly imagining at the same time that we shall be saved by faith. Nay, let us watch and pray, lest we fall into temptation; let us avoid all sin, let us fight the good fight of faith against the lusts that war against the soul. Especially let us beware of the sin of uncharitableness. Let us guard and keep the precious jewel of our state of grace in honest and good hearts until the great day comes when we shall leave this world and enter into eternal life. God grant it! Amen.

W. L. M.

Sermon for Twenty-third Sunday after Trinity.

PHIL. 3, 17—21.

The books of Moses relate the history of the pilgrimage of Israel through the desert to the land of promise. For centuries Israel had waited with earnest longing that God might fulfill the promise given, and oft repeated, to the Fathers. At last the fulfillment was at hand. With a strong arm and a mighty hand the Lord delivered His people from the bondage of Egypt. But Israel was not yet at the goal. They had to journey through the wilderness, and were encompassed by many dangers and pitfalls. The tribes through whose boundaries they had to pass were hostile and made fight against Israel. Besides, they were heathen tribes and given to all forms of sin and shame. Their evil example was not without influence upon Israel. Many of them were led astray by it, and for their defection were overthrown in the wilderness, and did not reach the land of promise. Among the Israelites themselves some rose up against the Lord and His servants, and they, too, were overthrown in the wilderness. But on the entire pilgrimage God also gave His people faithful leaders, men who themselves walked in the ways of the Lord and by word and example led others on the same path, men such as Moses, Joshua, and Caleb. And those who followed these leaders obtained the promise and did enter into His rest, while the others fell in the wilderness.

This pilgrimage of Israel, my friends, may be viewed as a type of the Christians' pilgrimage through the wilderness of this world to the land of promise in heaven. We, too, have the promise that there remaineth a rest to the people of God, Hebr. 4, 9, and that God will lead us into this land of rest. We are now on this pilgrimage, and, like Israel, are beset on all sides by dangers and temptations manifold and grave. The people round about us are hostile. Their evil example is ever before us, and many who once walked with us have been seduced by it. The inclination of our own flesh is towards the things of this present world, leading us to forget the goal ahead. Verily, the dangers besetting us are not to be underestimated. But God, who gave Israel faithful leaders who by word and example showed the right way, has given also unto us leaders who show us the path leading to the land of promise, and who by their own example encourage us to walk in this way. Our text presents to our view such a faithful leader, *viz.*, the Apostle Paul.

PAUL, A LEADER WHOSE EXAMPLE ALL CHRISTIANS SHOULD
CHEERFULLY FOLLOW.

1. *The example, or leadership, of Paul.*
2. *Why all Christians should cheerfully follow it.*

1.

"Brethren, be followers together of me," says the apostle. By these words the apostle sets himself before us as an example, or a leader, whom we Christians should follow. He does not, however,

presume to pose as the supreme example, or leader. He knows of a higher example and a more exalted leader than himself whom he himself is following. "Be followers *together* of me." Christ is the supreme example and leader. Paul himself is a follower of Christ, and now he exhorts us to join him on the pilgrimage after Christ. He would point out to us the way leading to the promised land, and by his own example induce us to walk in this way. We see him standing before us on the narrow path beckoning, and urging us: "Brethren, be followers of me! Though I be the least of the apostles, yet the grace of God bestowed upon me was not in vain; I will lead you the way to heaven. Follow after me!"

Now, which way does Paul point out? Which way does he lead? There are but two ways on which men attempt to reach heaven. These two ways are entirely different from each other; therefore not both of them can be right. One of them leads away from heaven and the land of promise. This road has many sidepaths and byways, but finally they all converge into one main road. Judging by appearances, this road would seem to be the right road, for it is much traveled. Man of himself always chooses this road. Paul also knew this road very well; he had traveled upon it many years and had been one of the most prominent travelers on it, before he discovered that this road is the wrong road leading away from the land of promise and into eternal perdition. Now, which is this wrong road? To state it briefly, it is the way of man's own works; it is what Paul, in the beginning of our chapter, terms "having confidence in the flesh," "trusting in the flesh," v. 4. This is one of the two ways which people travel in order to enter the rest of the people of God.

Paul does not point out or lead us this way. If this were the right way, Paul would have whereof to boast. He says: "I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more." If works and the righteousness of works availed, if one could reach the land of rest by his own efforts and his own works, I could boast more than others, I would surely reach the goal. For I was "circumcised the eighth day," etc.; "touching the righteousness which is in the Law, blameless," vv. 5. 6. If any man could reach the mark by the way of works, Paul most assuredly would have reached it. But hear what he has to say of this way which he knew so well from personal experience. He declares: "But what things were gain to me," etc.; "and do count them but dung," vv. 7. 8. Do hear! All those things of which the Jew was so proud, on account of which he believed to have a mortgage on heaven, all these things, all these advantages Paul counts but loss, yea, even dung! That is expressing it strongly. So filled with anxiety and concern is Paul lest we choose this way that he uses strong language to warn us. Oh! he knows this way only too well, knows it is the wrong way; therefore he uses every effort to keep us off it. We see him standing at the entrance to this way and, with a finger lifted in warning, says to us: "Brethren, beware of the way of your own works! It is the wrong road. It does not

lead to the goal you so earnestly strive for. It leads to perdition. 'By the deeds of the Law there shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God,' Rom. 3, 20. 'As many as are of the works of the Law are under the curse; for it is written,' etc. Therefore, brethren, beware of this way; beware of seeking salvation in your own works and righteousness!"

Paul shows and leads an entirely different way, the only way that really does lead to the goal. He said that he counts the righteousness of the flesh but dung. And he also tells us why; namely, "that I may *win Christ*, and be found in Him, not having mine own *righteousness*, which is of the Law, but that which is through the *faith of Christ*, the righteousness which is of God by faith," vv. 8. 9. To win Christ, that is the one thing needful to enter life. And in order to win Christ, we must renounce all righteousness of our works, even as Paul did. Paul, through the grace of God, found the way that leads to salvation, the righteousness which avails before Him. It is "the righteousness which is of God by faith." This righteousness is of God; God is the author of it. From unfathomable love God sent forth His only-begotten Son into this world of sin. He, Jesus Christ, cleared away the obstacles which separated us from God. He atoned for the sins of the world and perfectly kept the Law of God for us. Thus He wrought perfect righteousness. This righteousness of Christ is offered to all men in the Gospel. It is embraced and appropriated by faith. Faith lays hold upon Jesus and His righteousness, cloaks itself in it, so that God no longer perceives our sin, but only the righteousness of His dear Son. And thus we are pleasing to God; thus the gates of heaven are open to us; thus we attain to the rest of the people of God, to the land of promise above. — Behold, this is the way Paul points out, this is the way he leads, the way to heaven by faith in the merits of Jesus Christ. Paul is walking this way, and urges and endearingly coaxes us: "Follow after me, dear brethren!"

And he further shows us how to deport ourselves on the way. Lest any man become sluggish and careless in his walk and imagine he could live as he pleased since we are not saved by our works, Paul, as a wise and circumspect leader, points out to us how we should conduct ourselves during our pilgrimage. He says: "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended," etc., vv. 13. 14. He has not yet apprehended the mark, the prize. He therefore is not yet perfect. But one thing he does do, — he forgets the things he left behind when he entered upon the way that leads to life. He forgets the world with its sinful lusts, and joys, and pleasures, and treasures. He reaches forth unto those things which are before, and with all his might presses toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. He keeps under his body, and brings it into subjection, 1 Cor. 9, 27, and strives after all manner of Christian virtues lest he fall from faith and himself become an offense. — In this also Paul is our leader. "Brethren, follow after me; follow

me on the way of faith and of sanctification!" we hear him say. This is the way on which Paul is walking, this the way he would have us follow after him in order to obtain the land of promise in heaven, namely, etc.

2.

And now let us learn *why all Christians should cheerfully follow the leadership of Paul.*

Paul himself states the reason. "Brethren, be followers together of me. . . . For many walk, of whom I have told you often," etc. vv. 18. 19. Because there are so many other leaders who walk as the enemies of Christ, and whose end is destruction, therefore we should follow, not them, but *Paul*. Paul had spoken of these others as of "dogs, evil workers, the concision," v. 2. These are they who walk on that other path, the way of works, and seek to induce others to follow them. Paul says of them, they are "the enemies of the cross of Christ." It sounds harsh, but it is the truth. Those who seek to reach heaven by their works are enemies of the cross of Christ. They deem it foolishness that man is to be saved simply and solely by the cross of Christ, that man cannot cooperate in the least towards his justification. They pronounce this a pernicious doctrine. What else is this than enmity of the cross of Christ? Paul knows this from his own personal experience. He confesses with much sorrow and grief that, when he yet sought salvation in his own righteousness, he was a persecutor of the Church of Christ, v. 6. And the end of these people who seek salvation in their own works? What is their end? "Whose end is destruction," the apostle declares. That is the inevitable end of all those who, etc. It is not true that they reach the land of promise, only by a more devious and arduous route. They do not reach it at all. The goal which they reach is eternal damnation. Verily, you would not follow such leaders who but lead you into hell and damnation! Very well; then follow Paul and his example! If you do not follow him, you will not enter into the rest of God.

But if we do follow Paul, then we shall reach the land of promise and enter into the rest of God. Hear how Paul urges us to follow his leadership: "Brethren, be followers together of me! For *our* conversation is in heaven," etc. Yes, that is different from that which could be said of those other leaders, and better, too. They "mind earthly things," are earthly minded. They set their affection on things on the earth, Col. 3, 2, honor before men, riches, and a pleasant life. This earth is their home. "*Our* conversation [, however,] is in heaven," says the apostle. We are not earthly minded, we do not set our affection on things on the earth, but on things above. For the commonwealth of which we are citizens is above, is in heaven. We are merely strangers and pilgrims here on earth, but we hold citizenship in the commonwealth of heaven. And therefore we have a most blessed and lively hope. We look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come from heaven. With ardent longing and burning desire we wait for the Son of Man to come in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, Matt. 24, 30, and all His holy angels

with Him. For He shall come as our *Savior*. He will not judge us, but, rather, deliver us perfectly from the temptations of sin and Satan, from the dangers that beset us on our pilgrimage, from the hostility of the wicked. And more, He "shall change our vile body," etc., v. 21. Ah! then we shall have attained the goal, the end of all our hopes and desires. Then the grace of God will have been perfected in us. Then we shall have reached our home, sweet home, with Jesus in the glory of heaven. The pilgrimage will be at an end, and we shall have come into the rest which remaineth for the people of God.

Would you not reach that blessed end? Ah, then be up and doing! Follow Paul on the path which he has led. Look neither to the right nor to the left! Forget those things which are behind! Permit not yourselves to be detained on the way by the pleasures along the road. Press forward, press towards the mark! Set your mind and affections on the things above! Keep your eye on the goal! Look, there stands Paul, our leader, in the glory of heaven. He has finished his course. And he beckons us, and he calls, and coaxes, and urges: "Follow me, dear brethren! Do follow me! I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. I have obtained the crown of righteousness. I have come to the rest of the people of God. Follow me, and you also shall reach," etc. Ah! then, let us follow after Paul, let us walk in the way which he has gone. Yes, let us be faithful unto death that we may receive the crown of life. God grant it for Jesus' sake! Amen.

THEO. BUNDENTHAL.

Thanksgiving Sermon on Deut. 8, 7—14.

Again has the covenant which God once made in the days of Noah not ceased. Seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, have not failed. The glorious procession of sun and moon and stars and clouds has moved along in the appointed order, making the furrows wet with their showers, blessing the springing crops and bringing to plentiful ripeness the various fruits after their kind. The husbandman has sown, and the reaper has gathered, and we once more rejoice that the earth has yielded her increase, and that we are privileged to enjoy the riches of her products. The harvest-field is God's answer to man's cry for food, and right bountiful has that answer been.

"He hath crowned the year with His goodness, and His paths drop fatness," and so the rulers have taken occasion to say unto the people, "Come, let us sing unto the Lord; let us make a joyful noise unto the Rock of our Salvation," and gather in our places of worship to think of the kind Providence that has permitted us to fill our garners and store our barns with plenty. It may seem a trifle anomalous, amid our city chimneys and homes, void of even a little

green space, to celebrate a festival of harvest. It was not our lot to stand in the golden stubble and see the wagons laden with bundles, as one has expressed it, "four months' sunshine bound in sheaves." Yet that detracts not from the propriety and sanctity of the occasion. A moment's thought suffices to realize that the work of sowing and reaping is directly related to the comfort and prosperity of us all. Agriculture is the oldest of human industries and the most fundamental. Civilization and human society began with agriculture, and the social welfare ultimately rests upon it. It is fit, then, that one day in the year should celebrate that fact. This day does it—it is the festival, we may say, of Divine Providence, of God the Father, as the Creator and Giver of all temporal good, a time for us to reflect more particularly upon the First Article of our Creed which reads: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth," and on the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread!" Having received the bread, let the mind now reflect and the heart sing in gratitude and acknowledgment. To assist in this devotion, let us turn to the text, and observe what precious instruction and direction it presents:—

1. *That we have abundant reason to be thankful.*
2. *How we ought to give expression to our thankfulness.*

1.

The verses before us contain a graphic description of the land of Canaan, the country into which Moses and Joshua had led the people of Israel out of the land of bondage. When it says in the first line, v. 7: "The Lord bringeth thee into a good land," nothing could have been more true. Canaan was an exceedingly rich, a fertile and most blessed country, unsurpassed in its resources and prosperity. Ancient and modern geographers and historians are unanimous in the verdict that Canaan must have been of extraordinary fertility, of wonderful productiveness, else had it not been possible that millions of people could have lived in so small a territory and not only lived, but thrived in riches and affluence, as was the case with the Jews in the periods of their history.

A few items of comparison will permit us to judge for ourselves. Canaan, or Palestine, had 400 square miles; our native state, Missouri, has 65,400—accordingly, 65,000 more. Canaan, in the days of King Solomon, numbered about six million inhabitants; the population of Missouri is about two millions—three times less. How, we question, was it ever possible for so limited a surface of ground to provide food, and yea, even plenty? Our text says it was a "good land"; and continuing, it gives us an inspired and most inspiring picture of the land; it reads, v. 7: "A land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills." That means, it was well watered, and its alternation of hill and low country superinduced a constant alternation of sunshine and rain, heat and cold, and brought forth all varieties of products, cereals, and fruits,

as is recorded in v. 8: "A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig-trees, and pomegranates, a land of oil-olive and honey."

To quote how magnificently all these products thrived, we need only recall that instance from early history, when, anxious to see the land, they came unto the Brook of Eshcol and there cut down, says the holy writer, a branch of one cluster of grapes, so large that they bore it between two upon a staff. A rich country! No wonder that the sacred geographer adds, v. 9: "A land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness; thou shalt not lack anything in it;" and God expressly forbade: "There shall not be found among you any that is poor." But still more of richness, v. 9: "A land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass." We may conceive a fair estimate of the mineral wealth of Israel when we recall a few figures in connection with the building of the temple at Jerusalem. David had given for that purpose 3,000 talents of gold and 7,000 talents of refined silver; the princes of the tribes of Israel had contributed 5,000 talents of gold and 10,000 drams, of silver 10,000 talents, of brass 18,000 talents, and 160,000 talents of iron; and in the days of Solomon gold and silver were so plentiful that "silver was nothing accounted of." Assuredly, a "good land," a fertile territory, and if we connect with this what is even greater, its spiritual blessings, that its inhabitants were the chosen people of God, the sole possessors of the true and pure worship of Jehovah, in whom were centered the hopes of the world,—we can well understand the utterance of their leader: "What nation is there that hath God so nigh unto them?"

And, my beloved hearers, know ye of a land that is equally as highly favored? As we read these verses, do they not impress us as an exact description of our own God-favored land, blessed in its products, well-nigh illimitable? Is it not "a land of brooks, of mountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills"? Streams, broad and majestic, flow through valleys, fertile and rich; inland seas, deep as the ocean and abundant in commerce and fishing, invite our admiration and eye. A great open country rolls out before us from ocean to ocean; here forests stocked with most valuable woods and game; mountains, exhaustless in silver and gold, copper and coal; and where those forests break, plains so vast that empires might be carved out of them stretch out, and so fertile that they might supply one half of the world.

A few figures might suffice. The farmers of our country reaped an abundant harvest. The crop of — surpassed everything hitherto known. This year climaxes them all. The wheat harvest brought — bushels, corn —, and the cotton crop will be greater than ever. (Other comparisons.) All over prosperity, signs of activity, heavy earnings; for as our products go abroad, wealth comes pouring in. How true the language of our text: "The Lord, thy God, bringeth thee into a good land." Our merchants are the envy of emperors and kings, our business men dwell in mansions, our

mechanics command princely wages, our farmers live like lords. How many that are seated before me this evening, or their parents, came into this land, to use the expression of the patriarch Jacob, "having nothing but a staff," destitute, and now have become "two bands," possessed of house and home, comfort, and everything needed. And if, in addition—which is the chief blessing—you realize that the gracious offers of salvation still sound in your ears, that the precious Bible is still in our hands and in our sanctuary, that we have, unrestrained and unhindered, the means of grace and the observance of God's holy ordinances,—wherein do we come behind the chosen people of God in the Old Testament? Could we have it any better?

But if the same blessings and privileges are ours, then also the same duties and obligations. That let us further see.

2.

Two things does God impress upon His people's mind, vv. 10—14: first, they are to show forth their gratitude, to whom they owe these favors and blessings; secondly, they are not to squander and dissipate their gifts in haughty pride or in niggardly selfishness.

We are told in the spiritual realm: "Paul may plant, Apollos may water, but God giveth the increase," and no one can refute that statement. Not less true is it in the matter we discuss. Though the Lord is pleased to use us, making us His assistants in the work of production, though He puts upon us the honor of allowing us to cooperate with Him by our industry and efforts, we are absolutely, completely, entirely, dependent upon Him. Man cannot make food; man may sometimes so arrange as to have two blades of grass where before there was only one. But the production of the single blade is beyond the power and skill and cunning of man. Let him work as hard as flesh can hold, let agricultural science be perfected, with all its implements and apparatuses,—the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself. *He* maketh the grass to grow on the mountains, *He* watereth the hills from His chambers, and the earth is satisfied with the fruit of His works. "*He* crowneth things with His goodness." Beautifully is this expressed in one of our harvest hymns:

We plow the fields and scatter the good seed on the land,
But it is fed and watered by God's almighty hand;
He sends the snow in winter, the warmth to swell the grain,
The breezes and the sunshine and soft, refreshing rain.
All good gifts around us are sent from heaven above;
Then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord, for all His love!

How presumptuous, how ridiculous, then, for men to prate their genius, cunning, as the cause of our nation's prosperity, to speak of independence, to ascribe their comfortable position in life to their own ability and industry,—that they have worked hard! Let them work ever so hard, if God's blessing were not resting upon it, it would leave them as poor as Job and as penniless as Lazarus. This

day's purpose is lost upon us if it does not lead us to look upward from its bounties and gifts to the divine Giver of it all, and to recite from the experience in the school of manhood and womanhood what we once learned in the school of childhood: "I believe that God has made me and all creatures, that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them; also clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and home, wife and children, fields, cattle, and all my goods; that He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life; that He defends me against all danger, and guards and protects me from all evil; and all this purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me; for all which it is my duty to thank and praise, to serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true."

This is the first expression of gratitude — proper acknowledgment of the source of our blessings; and where there is that spirit, there cannot fail to be a right disposition as regards their appropriation and use. Some, no matter what the amount or limit of God's gifts, are always of a morose, dissatisfied, grumbling spirit. Let the cup run over, and the cornucopia be filled to overflowing, they are never content, joyful, thankful, always looking at the gloomiest side of things, walking about with a downcast countenance, as if groans and complaints were the most acceptable sacrifice that man can offer to God. Such a spirit is incompatible with a true sense of gratitude and the lessons of this day. "Godliness," says the apostle, "with contentment is great gain," etc., 1 Tim. 6, 6—8.

Don't grumble; it's displeasing to God. Be thankful and give thanks! That little word "give" is well worth emphasizing. It was a beautiful custom among ancient people of God that the first-fruits of the harvest had to be brought into their houses of worship, given to the Lord. No fixed law was laid down as to the quantity, but some offering had to be rendered, some gift presented. That custom has been abolished; the sense of it still remains. "When thou hast eaten and art full, then forget not the Lord, thy God," nor His cause, nor His sanctuary, nor those whom God has less abundantly blessed than you. With one hand lifted up to heaven offering sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, let the other be extended to the necessities of church and needy fellow-man in thanksgiving. That's the true attitude to-day. Covetousness, miserliness, niggardly, tight-fisted selfishness, or, on the other hand, squandering, making the day set aside for holy gratitude a day of carnal latitude, with special programs in playhouses and places of amusement, — such dispositions are out of harmony with the proclamation of the day, a blight and blot on the purpose specified. God grant that we, as Christians, may understand. Gathered around the great family board of our heavenly Provider, let us, in response to the question, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" give the answer, "I will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord." Amen.

L. B.